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FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTION IN THE CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN

Thematic issues before the Commission on the Status of Women

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

In its resolution 1996/6, the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to submit an analytical report to the Commission on the Status of Women on the thematic issues to be addressed at each session. According to the multi-year programme of work of the Commission, four critical areas of concern set out in the Platform for Action have been selected for review at the present session: education and training of women (chapter IV.B), women and the economy (chapter IV.F), women in power and decision-making (chapter IV.G) and women and the environment (chapter IV.K).

In preparation for the Commission's consideration of agenda item 3 (c), the Division for the Advancement of Women convened expert group meetings on each of the critical areas of concern, focusing on issues that had either not previously received specific attention or that required further exploration in the light of the Platform for Action. The present report addresses strategies to accelerate implementation of the Platform for Action in the four critical areas of concern, drawing on the recommendations of the expert group meetings.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1996/6 of 22 July 1996 requested the Secretary-General to submit an analytical report annually to the Commission on the Status of Women on the thematic issues to be addressed at each session in connection with the implementation of strategic objectives and action in selected critical areas of concern set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.[1] The four critical areas of concern selected for review at the forty-first session of the Commission are (1) education and training of women (chapter IV.B), (2) women and the economy (chapter IV.F), (3) women in power and decision-making (chapter IV.G) and (4) women and the environment (chapter IV.K). It was requested that the reports on themes submitted to the Commission include recommendations and conclusions and identify the responsible actors, and, as far as possible, be based on available data and information.

2. Just over a year and a half has elapsed since the Platform for Action was adopted. Many Governments are still formulating their action plans for its implementation. Only 25 countries have submitted their strategies or action plans for implementation of the Beijing results to the Secretariat in compliance with General Assembly resolution 50/203 of 22 December 1995. Past experience, together with results from expert group meetings and the interactive dialogues to be held during the Commission in 1997, may serve as a basis for identifying measures which could help to accelerate progress in achieving equality between men and women in the critical areas of concern identified at Beijing as crucial for eliminating discrimination against women and enabling women around the world to fully enjoy their human rights.

3. During 1996, the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat convened expert group meetings on each of the critical areas of concern to be taken up by the Commission at its present session. Each expert group meeting focused on issues that had not previously received the attention of the Commission, and/or that, in the view of the Secretariat, required further exploration in the light of the Platform for Action. In the critical area of concern "education and training of women", the focus of the expert group meeting was on vocational training and lifelong learning. This focus was selected as a follow-up to an earlier expert group meeting held in 1994 on the broader topic of promotion of literacy, education and training for women, the results of which were used in preparing the Platform for Action. In the area of women and the economy, the expert group meeting focused on the need for more women in top management positions. In the critical area of concern relating to women in power and political decision-making, the focus of the expert group meeting was the impact of gender difference on conflict resolution, keeping in mind that other aspects of political decision-making had been thoroughly discussed by the Commission in the past. In the area of women and the environment, the expert group meeting focused on the crucial links between population, environment and sustainable development from a gender perspective, emphasizing the role of women as actors in relation to environmental issues and the need to increase their participation in decision-making. The aim of all four expert group meetings held in 1996 was to identify policy measures to accelerate the achievement of equality between men and women, the elimination of discrimination, and women's

empowerment in the context of the Platform for Action. The recommendations emanating from the expert group meetings are set out extensively in the present report. The reports themselves are available as background papers in one official language only.

4. The present report highlights the importance of having more women in decision-making positions at all levels and identifies some of the positive measures that can be carried out to achieve this. In this regard, education is a prerequisite for women's full and equal participation in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making and as leaders in the public sphere. It also emphasizes responsibilities of Governments, civil society and the United Nations system in this regard and points out that women themselves need to become active players and network among themselves and with men in the movement towards equality and empowerment.

5. The report indicates that a rethinking of the development approach from a gender perspective is necessary. There is need for a different perspective that integrates the micro and macro, bridges the public and private domains (especially the productive and reproductive spheres) and empowers both women and men to take part in decision-making at all levels. The Platform for Action places considerable emphasis on the importance of increasing the number of women in decision-making in order that their voices can be heard and their needs taken into account.

6. The rationale for promoting women as decision makers is elaborated in the Platform for Action, mainly in chapter IV.G (Women in power and decision-making). In paragraph 181, the Platform for Action recalls that achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy - it will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and will allow women's interests to be taken more directly into account.

7. The Commission's attention is particularly drawn to sections I.E, II.C, III.D and IV.D entitled "Strategies to accelerate implementation".

I. EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WOMEN

8. The Fourth World Conference on Women, in line with previous world conferences, recognized the central role of education for the advancement of women and for equality between men and women. It is widely acknowledged that women's education yields numerous benefits, including higher economic productivity, decreased maternal and infant mortality, improved family health and nutrition, delayed marriages and lower birth rates. The returns on women's basic education are especially high since they promote the personal empowerment of women, the status of their families and the community at large. Education and training are prerequisites for their full and equal participation in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making and for becoming leaders. Education and the school system play an important role in the democratization process that is taking place in many regions and in which the gender aspects need to be fully integrated. It also has to be borne in mind,

given the lagged effect of education, that changes introduced have no immediate impact, but become visible only after one generation.

9. As noted earlier, in 1994 an Expert Group Meeting on Gender, Education and Training examined the rationale for female education, obstacles to it, progress achieved at all levels of formal schooling and the complementary role of non-formal education.[2] The recommendations were directed mainly at measures that would eliminate the gender gap in education and remove bias in school materials and teacher training. Attention was paid to girls and women in especially difficult circumstances, such as refugees. The recommendations formed the basis for the critical area of concern "education and training of women" in chapter IV.B of the Platform for Action.

10. Linked to this previous work, the Division for the Advancement of Women examined two areas in education that build on primary and secondary education and are of particular relevance for the economic, social and political empowerment of women. These are technical and vocational training and lifelong learning as a tool for capacity-building of women on a broad scale. It was felt that vocational training and women's preparation for the labour market has been not adequately and extensively considered, either in the preparatory process for the Fourth World Conference on Women or in the Platform for Action. Given the fact that women are entering the labour market in unprecedented numbers in all regions, there is an urgent need to evaluate whether they are adequately prepared or whether, due to their lack of preparation, they remain in unfavourable positions and at the edge of exploitation. In this respect it is the quality of education that women receive that is at stake. Directly linked to this question is the responsibility of the various actors in education, in particular the role and responsibility of the Government. In order to explore the issues further, the Division for the Advancement of Women organized an Expert Group Meeting on Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning of Women, which took place at the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization at Turin, Italy, from 2 to 6 December 1996. The present report draws extensively on the conclusions and recommendations of the Meeting.

A. Recent developments and trends

11. In education and training, gender analysis is seen as a tool to further analyse the issue and to bring about comprehensive, innovative proposals for policy-making that take into account the gender variable. A gender perspective needs to be applied to human resources development for which education is the basis. It is necessary to examine whether girls and women have the same access as men and boys to formal education, retention and equal possibilities in obtaining school diplomas, and retraining in all fields. Progress has been made in the past 10 years in collecting data disaggregated by sex on education and training, including data on access, performance and fields of study. Gender differences have been analysed and educational policies developed that would remove bias and enhance equality in education between men and women. However, the link between the education of women and their integration into the economy, their role in sustainable development and their participation in political life has yet to be fully recognized.

12. Significant gains have been made in improving the access of girls and women to education and the quality of their education. However, women continue to account for the majority of the world's adult illiterates, whose numbers have undergone a phenomenal expansion from 1980 to 1995. Steadily climbing, the proportion of women among the world's illiterates reached 63.8 per cent in 1995. It is projected that the absolute number would decline as from the second half of the 1990s, but women's share could reach 64 per cent by the year 2000, if the present trend continues. As of today, only some 70 countries in the world have attained gender parity in literacy. The huge number of illiterates, which is highest in the least developed countries, constitute the major challenge to education. To a large extent, the increases in adult illiteracy in Southern Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States have been the net result of literacy progress falling behind rapid population growth. Illiteracy remains highest among older women who have never had the opportunity of formal or non-formal schooling. Female literacy levels have been improving much faster than those for men for the age groups below 55, and for the age groups 15-39 in particular they have been improving twice as fast.[3]

13. In most regions, the male-female gap in enrolment at the different levels of education is now narrowing. However, huge differences persist in access to primary education in some parts of Africa, in particular sub-Saharan Africa, and in Central Asia compared to other regions. More than two thirds of the children who never go to school or who drop out before completing school are girls. In Eastern Asia and Oceania and Latin America and the Caribbean, the first level gross enrolment ratios for both males and females exceed 100 per cent, indicating that both sexes are fully enrolled in school. In Latin America and the Caribbean and in many developed countries, the male-female disparity in enrolment ratios has practically disappeared. In fact, the disparity in enrolment in second and third levels is now in favour of females in many countries. This development has occurred recently and has not been fully explained. Among other reasons, it is attributed to early school-leaving and migration of boys in search of work.[4] Another possible explanation is that women strive for high levels of formal qualification in response to the competition with men for limited employment opportunities. Women still concentrate in a few fields of study. Despite improvements in access to education, the quality of education that girls receive is a source of concern given the stereotyping and biases that persist in teaching materials and in the delivery system, including location of schools, subjects offered and teachers' attitudes.

B. The link to the labour market

14. As the quantity and quality of jobs available for men and women is either being threatened or undergoing major changes, employability has become the key in access to both employment and self-employment opportunities. Given the constraints and unequal opportunities that women face in the labour market, it is particularly important to develop women's employability. Knowledge, skills and competencies of both men and women have become the cornerstone not only of personal growth and employability, but also of the competitiveness of enterprises and the economic and sustainable development of societies. In a competitive environment, the comparative advantages of every individual,

enterprise and country will increasingly depend on competitive work, based on knowledge, practical skills, innovation and technology. Therefore, investment in the education, training and development of all human resources to their full potential has become more crucial than ever before.

15. As discussed in the section II below, job segregation remains a persistent characteristic of all labour markets, regardless of the level of economic development, female participation and level of education, and despite efforts that have been made to promote women professionals. This segregation originates in the educational choices of men and women and the fields of study and specialization, which remain highly polarized. Discrimination in girls' access to education and training persists in many areas owing to stereotyped role models and inadequate and gender-biased teaching and educational materials, which reduce girls' options for future choices by underestimating or downplaying their talents and capabilities. The vocational training offered to girls and women is very limited in scope and fields of specialization compared with that available to boys and men.

16. It is acknowledged in the field of development assistance that investment in general and basic education has to be the first priority for public policy since it represents the most cost-effective use of public resources for human development. Completion by all children of high-quality primary and lower secondary schooling and the provision of remedial general education to adults in developing countries, while not being sufficient, would make a bigger contribution to equalization than any policy measure affecting training alone. More girls also need to be encouraged to enter technical and scientific fields. A basic education, during which basic skills such as strategic thinking have been acquired in addition to literacy and numeracy, lays a foundation of knowledge that makes further training and retraining effective. Changing patterns of demand in the labour market make a sound general education even more important than in the past and reinforce the need for initial acquisition of broad rather than narrow skills. Given the speed of technological changes and transformations in society and in the workplace, new skills have to be acquired throughout a life course and professional career. In modern sector manufacturing and services for example, broad competencies gained through quality academic secondary education are more significant than specific skills which could be quickly outdated.[5]

17. The Expert Group Meeting on Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning of Women[6] recognized the need for a system of skill development which was open, flexible, responsive to change and gender-sensitive, and which catered also for re-entrants to the workforce. Such training schemes could also include remedial education for adults, in particular for illiterate adult women. Given the increase in self-employment, entrepreneurial skills for small business need to be further developed and intensified. A new approach should be taken for training women in informal employment and self-employment as well as in non-traditional occupations. Any training package for women should include training in legal literacy and decision-making. More women should be drawn to science and technology and participate in the process from the design to the application, monitoring and evaluation of new technologies.

C. Lifelong learning from a gender perspective

18. Due to the explosion of knowledge, the high speed of social change and technical developments, pure factual school knowledge is becoming increasingly obsolete. Instead of being confined to a fixed number of years of schooling during childhood and youth, it is widely recognized that education is now to be made available throughout life. Lifelong learning requires that individuals acquire generic skills and aptitudes, for example, "learning to learn skills", that will enable women to take responsibility for their development and motivate them to learn, to seek opportunities for self-development and to be sensitive to changes taking place in the environment and to the options available to respond to these changes. Learning at various stages of life is a major key for removing obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life. Lifelong learning can bring empowerment and be an end in itself, but the credits of lifelong learning go much further and contribute to the economic and social development of each society. Lifelong learning includes knowledge and skills gained in formal education and training as well as learning that occurs in informal settings, a type of learning that is of particular relevance to women. The wider scope of lifelong learning with regard to the upgrading of skills, and the ongoing acquisition of knowledge beyond that accumulated during youth need to be examined without gender blindness. Gender differences exist with regard to requests and needs for lifelong learning, in delivery systems and educational approaches.

19. Elderly women deserve special attention in the field of continuing education. Recent demographic trends show that women worldwide outlive men and have a higher life expectancy. Elderly women are a resource of accumulated knowledge, skills and experiences. They need continuous training possibilities to live a fulfilling, productive and healthy life. Training is a tool to increase participation in public life, to prevent disease, maintain a healthy lifestyle and keep up activity.

D. Actors responsible for education and training

20. The Fourth World Conference on Women identified various actors responsible for implementing the Platform for Action, noting that "Governments have the primary responsibility for implementing the Platform for Action" and to that end, "commitment at the highest political level is essential" (Platform for Action, para. 293). In the fields of vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education, actions should be taken by Governments "in cooperation with employers, workers and trade unions, international and non-governmental organizations, including women's and youth organizations, and educational institutions" (Platform for Action, para. 82). The main responsibility of Governments is to "provide the required budgetary resources to the educational sector, with reallocation within the educational sector to ensure increased funds for basic education" (Platform for Action, para. 84 (a)) and "to monitor the implementation of educational reforms and measures in relevant ministries, and establish technical assistance programmes" (Platform for Action, para. 84 (b)). The responsibility of each actor needs to be scrutinized and, if possible, incentives offered that could enhance their active role in implementing the recommendations.

21. While implementing the recommendation of the Platform for Action in the field of education, it is important to consider recent developments in the field of educational policies. In most countries of the world, education and training systems are undergoing reform geared to improve their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, equality and sustainability in responding to the new requirements of the world of work. Responsibilities of Governments are clearly defined with regard to the provision of universal primary education, but vary when it comes to higher education or vocational training. There is a general understanding that it is the Government that has to ensure standards and gender equality in higher levels of education and in vocational training. Today there is a trend to redefine the role of the State and reduce its direct involvement in the provision of vocational training, while assigning increasing responsibilities to the private sector, in particular enterprises and individuals. The question is whether Governments should take up new functions in regulating the overall system, in which diverse public and private actors would compete in an open market. While these changes open up new opportunities for lifelong learning for both men and women, they also bring up new risks, in particular for those groups and sectors that remain at a disadvantage in access to a market-based training system. Privatization, decentralization, reduced public funding and increased dominance of enterprises in training may diminish the possibilities for girls and women to enhance their employability and career development through access to good quality training.

22. Although it is recognized that the benefits from investing in girls' and women's education are great and can be quantified, the market fails to capture the full benefit to society of investing in women and girls. At this moment, it is Governments that should take the lead where the market fails or is absent. Public policy can contribute, directly or indirectly, to reducing gender inequalities - for example, by modifying the legal and regulatory framework to ensure equal opportunities, by redirecting public policies and public expenditures to those investments with the highest social returns or by adopting targeted interventions that correct for gender inequalities at the micro level.[7]

23. Many training systems, especially in developing countries, lack the necessary resources to adopt new technologies and approaches and the capability to respond rapidly to labour market demand. They continue to provide training which may be irrelevant to the labour market or for entrepreneurial development. Particular importance needs to be given to the continuation of a process of investment in human capital through teaching women new kinds of skills. The demands of changing work environments require wider profiles of the teaching content, a higher level of education and an emphasis on thinking skills.

24. Alliances among the various partners at the national and international levels, including the State, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, women's groups, trade unions, employers' federations, cooperatives, research and higher educational institutions, international organizations and others, are needed to bring these prospects for training and development of women's skills to reality. The private sector in particular will play an increasingly important part.

25. Whatever its role in the financing and provision of training, the State has the responsibility for promoting equality between men and women, through

incentives, legislation, advocacy and other measures. This would include ensuring that adequate value, in the sense of both status and earnings, is given to women's work. International organizations also play a useful role in advocating gender equality in vocational training. This is an area for political action, with women's groups and workers' organizations, national and international, exerting pressure to capitalize on the gains already made in this area. There is need for the establishment and maintenance of effective labour market information systems that should not only provide gender-sensitive data, qualitative as well as quantitative, but also guide the development and delivery of training programmes and assist women in selecting the types of training and jobs that best fit their needs. Finally, both national and international structures are needed to monitor and support the implementation of education and training programmes for women.

E. Strategies to accelerate implementation

26. The Platform for Action, in identifying "education and training of women" as one of the 12 critical areas of concern, defined six strategic objectives to achieve equality: (1) ensure equal access to education; (2) eradicate illiteracy among women; (3) improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education; (4) develop non-discriminatory education and training; (5) allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms; (6) promote lifelong education and training for girls and women (chapter IV.B).

27. Education and training is one of the few critical areas of concern where unanimous agreement was reached with regard to benchmarks - the provision of universal access to and gender equality in the completion of primary education for girls by the year 2000 (Platform for Action, para. 81 (b)); the elimination of the gender gap in basic and functional literacy, as recommended in the World Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien) (para. 81 (c)); the provision of universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 20 per cent of primary school-age children by the year 2000; the closing of the gender gap in primary and secondary education by the year 2005; the provision of universal primary education in all countries before the year 2015 (para. 80 (b)); and reduction of the female illiteracy rate to at least half its 1990 level, with emphasis on rural women, migrant, refugee and internally displaced women and women with disabilities (para. 81 (a)).

28. The Platform for Action also describes actions to be taken in the field of vocational training under the critical areas of concern "women and the economy" (chapter IV.F) and "the girl child" (chapter IV.L). The Platform for Action makes specific reference to lifelong learning, various types of training and continuing education in many other critical areas of concern, in particular to human rights education and legal literacy (paras. 58 (p), 61 (a), 124 (n), 125 (e) and 230 (f)); training in health (paras. 107 (a), (e), (g), (k), (l), (m) and (o) and 108 (a)); training for the participation of women in public life (paras. 195 (c) and (e)); and training for sustainable development (para. 258 (b) (v)). As such, the Fourth World Conference on Women went beyond earlier recommendations in the field of education and training. It built on

previous work but applied a gender perspective and specified the action required and the actors responsible for achieving gender equality.[8]

29. At this stage of the implementation process of the Platform for Action, the Commission on the Status of Women might wish to examine whether the strategic objectives defined at the Fourth World Conference are being implemented and also take into account recommendations made by the Expert Group Meeting on Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning of Women.

30. The Expert Group Meeting concluded, inter alia, that:

(a) Sufficient effort needs to be made by all actors (Governments, national, regional and international bodies, bilateral and multilateral donors and non-governmental organizations) to meet the targets set in the Platform for Action with regard to the eradication of illiteracy and achievement of universal primary education;

(b) It is imperative that education, technical training and lifelong learning are considered as integral parts and a continuum. The concept of training and lifelong learning includes the acquisition of knowledge and skills gained in formal education, as well as learning that occurs in informal ways and traditional knowledge, that prepares women to take an active role in the labour market and the economic and social development of their countries. A holistic approach should be adopted, ensuring that women enjoy equality throughout the process in a new culture of learning involving individuals, enterprises, organizations and society at large;

(c) In the context of a changing world, science and technology education and information services should be given added importance. In order to develop the skills required, women need to have full access to vocational training and further education at all levels of science and technology. To bridge the gender gap and increase the access of girls and women to science and technology education and to vocational training and lifelong learning, action must be taken using a wide range of strategies and mixed modalities;

(d) A gender balance in the teaching profession and educational administration at all levels has to be ensured; to this end administrative reforms to increase the number of female principals, administrators and planners should be undertaken;

(e) The education, training and lifelong learning of women should be mainstreamed in national human development plans and policies, equal opportunity policies and industrial policies with an emphasis on employment and employability of women. National machineries for the advancement of women should urge policy makers in Government and in the private sector to ensure that all these policies are responsive to gender concerns, and that women and their organizations participate in the policy-making processes;

(f) The relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of training should be enhanced through the establishment of alliances among the various partners, including the public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, organizations of employers and cooperatives;

(g) The State has a major responsibility in promoting and facilitating such alliances by developing the regulatory framework, the financing mechanisms, incentive schemes and technical support. Governments should be ultimately responsible for filling gaps in education and training provisions, especially for women in poverty, women in rural and depressed areas and women with social, economic, cultural and physical constraints;

(h) Employers' and workers' organizations also play a critical role in alliances and should be actively involved in decision-making processes and the provision of training at national and decentralized levels;

(i) The revision and reform of textbooks, teaching aids and curricula as well as the removal of bias from teacher training are prerequisites for the development of non-discriminatory education and training;

(j) The creation of an enabling environment for contributions by non-governmental organizations in all fields of education and in particular to lifelong learning is of importance.

II. WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

31. In addressing the situation of women in the economy, the Platform for Action, in the critical area of concern "women and the economy" (chapter IV.F), focused on three categories of the economically active female population: women as employees, women as entrepreneurs and women as economic decision makers. In the past, considerable attention was given by policy makers to the first two categories, while less attention was given to women as economic decision makers, despite the strategic importance of women's access to economic decision-making processes and structures as highlighted in the Platform for Action (para. 150). Further development of a framework for action and of specific measures to be taken to enhance women's position as economic decision makers is still needed.

32. The Platform for Action stressed that women are virtually absent from or poorly represented in economic decision-making, including the formulation of policies and strategies for the eradication of poverty (para. 47) and decision-making with respect to structural adjustment programmes, loans and grants (para. 151), and that this situation limits their impact on economic structures and policies which have a direct influence on society and on women's and men's relative status (para. 150).

33. As stated in the Platform for Action, "there are considerable differences in women's and men's access to and opportunities to exert power over economic structures in their societies. In most parts of the world, women are virtually absent from or are poorly represented in economic decision-making, including the formulation of financial, monetary, commercial and other economic policies, as well as tax systems and rules governing pay. ... the actual development of ... economic structures and policies has a direct impact on women's and men's access to economic resources, their economic power and consequently the extent of equality between them at the individual and family levels as well as in society as a whole" (para. 150).

34. Among the categories of decision makers in the economy, the group of managers, especially at the highest levels of the hierarchy of economic organizations, is among the most strategic. The International Labour Organization (ILO) establishes a strong linkage between women's access to decision-making and women's position in the labour market through their access to management. ILO considers that, worldwide, a major and persistent form of discrimination against women in the labour market is their segregation in very few occupations. This phenomenon, categorized as occupational segregation, refers to women's persistent presence in a relatively small number of "female" occupations with the singular characteristic that women are found in occupations of low status and pay, while occupations of higher status and pay are dominated by men.[9]

35. As stated by ILO, although over the past decade or so there has been a perceptible upward trend in the representation of women in managerial and administrative categories relative to their share in total employment, to date, women are far under-represented and very few have reached the highest ranks of organizations and institutions and the concept of the "glass ceiling" (an invisible but impassable barrier that prevents women from rising professionally regardless of their education and experience) is widely accepted as reflecting the reality of women's blocked upward mobility to top decision-making levels.

36. The Platform for Action emphasizes that women are increasingly found at lower levels of management (para. 161) and that in the private sector, including transnational and national enterprises, women are largely absent from management and policy levels (para. 162).

37. In strategic objective F.5, the Platform for Action calls for the elimination of occupational segregation by promoting the equal participation of women in highly skilled jobs and senior management positions, and through other measures that stimulate women's on-the-job career development and upward mobility in the labour market, and by stimulating the diversification of occupational choices by both women and men; women should be encouraged to take up non-traditional jobs; and men should be encouraged to seek employment in the social sector (para. 178 (g)).

38. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women states in article 11 that States Parties should take appropriate measures to ensure that women and men have equal rights to the same employment opportunities as well as to free choice of profession and to promotion.

39. In this regard and in order to further elaborate a framework for action and specific measures to be taken to enhance women's access to and impact as senior managers in strategic economic organizations, the Division for the Advancement of Women convened an Expert Group Meeting on Women and Economic Decision-making in International Financial Institutions and Transnational Corporations, which was held at Simmons College Graduate School of Management, Boston, Massachusetts, United States of America, from 11 to 15 March 1996. The main recommendations[10] arising from the Meeting are contained in paragraph 59 below.

A. Women in management: some trends

40. Over the past few decades, a major positive development has been women's increased participation in the labour market. ILO reports that 41 per cent of women aged 15 years and above are economically active in the world today. Moreover, based on the ILO classification of the economically active population by occupational categories, data reveal that over the past decade or so there has been a perceptible upward trend in the representation of women in managerial and administrative categories. However, the increase is far below trends in education and access to formal employment. Currently, very few women are found in the occupational category "administrative and managerial workers"; most women work as professional, technical and related workers (mostly as nurses and teachers), as clerical and service workers and as sales workers.[11]

41. Data collected from various other sources confirm this general trend and furthermore show that, despite the growth in women's employment and the fact that women are becoming fully committed members of the workplace, women managers are under-represented, underutilized and their distribution among the levels of management is skewed in all countries and in all areas, in both the private and public sectors. Even in the traditionally female-dominated professions, such as education and health, women remain largely in secondary positions relative to men.

42. A recent study showed that in the United States of America, where women account for 47 per cent of the work force, they make up only 10 per cent of the officers at the largest United States companies and an average of just 2 per cent of the senior executive positions; and of the 978 women with vice-president-level titles at the 500 largest companies, about 271, or 28 per cent, hold positions dealing directly with revenue generation that are more likely to lead to the highest jobs. Instead, the study stressed, women clustered in staff jobs in such areas as public relations and human resources.[12] In Thailand, while the percentage of women managers increased faster than that of men managers, women's participation reached a mere 19 per cent in 1990 from 7.6 per cent in 1974.[13] In South Africa, a recent survey of 100 South African companies showed that only 41 women occupy executive positions and that the majority of women are at junior levels.[14] In Latin America and the Caribbean, despite a steady increase in the proportion of the economically active female population in administrative and managerial occupations, evidence shows a sustained pattern of segregation in the higher levels of the hierarchy, tending to cluster women managers in mid-level administrative positions. In Venezuela, although women represented 54 per cent of all administrative and managerial workers, women had a share of only 17 per cent of the highest level posts.[15] In the Nordic countries, a recent survey of the 100 largest private enterprises revealed that, in all those countries, the highest proportion for women chief executive officers was 2.6 per cent, and for women board members, 14 per cent.[16] A recent study on sub-Saharan Africa showed that in most financial institutions women managers have not been able to move to the level of assistant general manager.[17]

43. The linkages between women's access to economic decision-making positions at the national and international levels are shown, inter alia, by the rate of participation of women heads of delegation of Member States in the deliberations

of the United Nations on economic and financial questions. The trend, although growing, has been very slow and the levels remain very low. The percentage of women heads of delegation to the Second Committee of the General Assembly reached a level of 13 per cent in 1995 compared with 3.6 per cent in 1985 and 6.0 per cent in 1975. In the Economic and Social Council, women heads of delegation represented 3.3 per cent of all delegations in 1995, reflecting an increase from 1.8 in 1975. In 1985, however, there were no women heads of delegation.[18]

B. Determinants of women's access to management and policy implications

44. Systematic investigation of women in management is relatively new. Until the late 1970s, women remained virtually invisible as managers, and their absence was generally considered a non-issue. Earlier studies showed that in all countries broad societal changes (access to education and employment, and legal changes towards equality) during recent decades resulted in more women entering lower-level managerial positions.[19] In both developed and developing countries, the expansion of banking and other financial services as well as of the public sector also contributed to the opening of opportunities for women in lower- and middle-level management positions during the 1970s and 1980s. In most countries, as new jobs were created, women moved into management as men moved up the hierarchy. In all countries, however, neither the political nor the legal changes were sufficiently powerful to counter resistance to women entering the most senior managerial levels. Recently, it was recognized that the earlier prediction of an anticipated "breakthrough" into the centres of organizational power seems to have been premature.[20]

45. This assessment led to the need to establish a distinction between entry into management and upward mobility within management, with their respective policy implications.

46. At the entry level into management, women's access to tertiary education and training as well as women's expanded career choices and access to employment are considered basic determinants of the supply of women managers. In this context, legal changes and public policies seeking to remove discrimination in education and employment play an important role. Moreover, affirmative action programmes have enabled organizations to recruit and hire women managers and to place them in managerial jobs, thus creating greater opportunities for upward mobility.

47. However, once in a career, women may encounter structural and behavioural barriers that restrict their vertical mobility. These barriers are a complex set of factors operating at various stages of career development. Whether in the public or the private sector, individuals often advance to top decision-making positions through career paths. The absence of women in top positions suggests that women's career paths are different from men's, or that, in trying to follow the same path, women encounter different or more severe obstacles, as discussed in section III below.

48. To understand the reality faced by women managers and the restrictions they face in their upward mobility to top decision-making positions, four interrelated and complementary perspectives have been developed.[20]

49. The first perspective suggests that individual differences between women and men could explain the paucity of women in management. The main recommendation is that women themselves must change to "fit in" by improving their skills, increase their self-confidence, become more strongly motivated to move up the career ladder, and exhibit more stereotypically male approaches to management. Women, on their own or stimulated by organizations, have increasingly turned to business schools, economics programmes and special management training courses to obtain the requisite qualifications for upward movement in management. Networking systems and mentoring programmes have been promoted in many cases to complete the set of actions initiated by women.

50. The second perspective focuses on organizations' and employers' responsibility for women's upward mobility. It states that not only women but organizations themselves need to change by eliminating barriers and providing incentives to increase the number of women managers and support their upward mobility. The main derived recommendation is that organizations should create career paths for women and men managers with an equal probability of leading to the top. Mechanisms such as affirmative action programmes have enabled organizations to hire women managers and to place them into higher positions, thus creating greater probability for upward mobility.

51. The third perspective stresses that discrimination is institutionalized and built into the organizational culture. In order to affect organizations, discrimination as a fact should be recognized by both women and men. Once recognized, the commitment of the overall organization, specially of senior managers, is required by a process of change in the basic assumptions about organizations. Based on this approach, measures such as mandated sessions to educate all managers - senior and junior - about the patterns of implicit and explicit discrimination and training in new non-discriminatory behaviours have been implemented.

52. The fourth perspective suggests that the interests of the organizations' most powerful members play a role in limiting women's access to top decision-making positions. Consequently, it is recommended stressing to senior executives the benefits of including more women executives and the costs of excluding them. This perspective emphasizes that it is important for women's upward mobility to convince organizations that women employees must be viewed as a competitive advantage instead of a legislated necessity. In some countries, organizations promoting equal opportunity for senior-level women - such as Catalyst in the United States of America and the Federation of Business and Professional Women in South Africa - provide firms with prestige incentives, such as awards, for advancing women into senior management.

53. Global competition and the need for top quality managers are making women's promotion into management a business issue, rather than strictly an issue of equality. For success, it is recognized that continued changes are needed at the individual level among both women and men, and at the organizational and societal levels.

C. Strategies to accelerate implementation

54. The Platform for Action assessed the rationale for increasing women's participation as economic decision makers. It stressed that women's contributions, concerns and needs should be incorporated in the definition of economic policies and structures because these play a determining role in women's relative status and power in society. Then, by being part of the decision makers, women will be able to express their interests, needs and concerns and make their contributions recognized.

55. In strategic objective F.5, the Platform for Action highlighted the need to eliminate occupational segregation and, in this regard, urged Governments, employers, employees, trade unions and women's organizations, to promote the equal participation of women in highly skilled jobs and senior management positions.

56. The Platform for Action, in the general context of women's access to decision-making, calls on, among others, Governments, the private sector, employers' organizations, subregional and regional bodies as well as international organizations to take positive action to build a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers in strategic decision-making positions (para. 192 (a)).

57. Moreover, ILO recommends that policy makers seize the opportunities currently offered by the restructuring of employment that is taking place in many countries, to challenge the inefficiencies and inequities inherent in the gender segregation of the labour force, including occupational segregation.[21]

58. In order to accelerate the implementation of strategic objective F.5, specifically referring to occupational segregation and women's access to top managerial positions, the Commission might wish to consider the conclusions and recommendations of the 1996 Expert Group Meeting on Women and Economic Decision-making in International Financial Institutions and Transnational Corporations and suggest tangible measures for different actors to undertake on a priority basis.

59. The Expert Group Meeting concluded, inter alia, that:

(a) Women have made significant progress in terms of education, participation in economic activity and social status. However, they have a long way to go as far as advancement to top decision-making positions is concerned;

(b) There is ample evidence that increasing the representation of women in decision-making is good for business, not just for equality:

(i) For corporations, exclusion of women from decision-making translates into losses and costs: costs of staff turnover and loss of talent; loss of real and potential market share due to overlooking the needs of major consumer bases; and loss of shareholder value. It translates into loss of half the potential talent if companies are not seen by women as attractive employers;

(ii) For organizations, the need to rationalize shrinking resources and to have a lasting effect calls for new approaches. To develop these new approaches organizations need to include the most qualified staff - women and men - in decision-making; to increase the diversity of views; to better reflect the composition of the client population; and to demonstrate through their own staffing that they are committed to the advancement of women;

(c) The full and sustainable empowerment of women requires that a critical mass of women be represented at all levels in the decision-making process. This is essential to ensuring that institutional barriers to the advancement of women are eliminated and that a continuous pool of qualified women is available for future advancement. Critical mass, which is defined as at least one third representation, provides a support level that can mitigate perceived tokenism;

(d) It was suggested that transnational corporations appoint a critical mass of women to their boards; develop and adopt policies and practices to increase the level of recruitment; recognize the strategic dimension of human resources; develop specific, measurable, achievable and time-bound plans for promoting women to senior positions; appoint women to international assignments; ensure balanced representation of women and men on external advisory councils and regional boards; and develop best practices to enhance and support the development of women through organizations such as chambers of commerce, business and professional clubs and associations, boards of trade, and industry associations;

(e) It was recommended that international financial institutions adopt the goal of having a critical mass of women in decision-making and management throughout the institutions, including boards and staff positions; encourage Member States to establish a pool of and appoint qualified women to serve as board members and in management; include balanced staffing mixes to review the gender dimension of all programmes and projects; assess executing agencies for their ability to implement gender-sensitive projects; require senior managers to involve women in decision-making and to develop indicators and monitoring mechanisms; review conventional methods of recruitment and modify selection profiles; encourage women to move into management; develop practical interventions to address dual career issues for women and men; hold managers accountable for developing action plans and link this to performance evaluation and rewards; and encourage the growth of support systems, such as mentoring and coaching. The Meeting strongly stressed the need for commitment on the part of the presidents of these institutions, as well as on the part of human resources directors and managers;

(f) The role of Governments was considered a determining factor in achieving the goal of achieving a critical mass of women in economic decision-making positions. Governments were recommended to develop policies, programmes and practices to ensure gender balance at all levels of decision-making in the government, intergovernmental bodies, and regional and international financial institutions; create, develop, monitor and enforce employment policies in both the public and private sectors; incorporate provisions into bilateral treaties and other agreements that facilitate spousal employment in host countries; remove obstacles restrictive to the formation of women's non-governmental

organizations; establish or expand mechanisms that facilitate interaction between, and mobility among managers/executives in profit, non-profit and public sectors; and establish partnership with other actors;

(g) The United Nations system was recommended to take a lead in ensuring that a critical mass of women are represented in top levels of management in its own agencies and in Member States. It was proposed that United Nations agencies should support Governments, transnational corporations, international financial institutions and organizations in general in their efforts to promote women to top positions; encourage Member States to appoint more women to the boards and secretariats of United Nations bodies and to United Nations committees dealing with economic, financial and budgetary issues; and increase collaboration and exchange information;

(h) The Meeting considered that non-governmental organizations could act as both advocacy groups and catalysts for change. Non-governmental organizations were recommended to partner with transnational corporations, Governments, international financial institutions, other non-governmental organizations, and other actors; identify and recommend potential employees and board members; monitor and publicize best and/or worst practices; provide reward and recognition for transnational corporations, international financial institutions, Governments and other actors; report the progress to the Commission on the Status of Women; and improve their interventions in promoting women in economic decision-making through training, technical assistance and governmental support.

III. WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

60. Under the critical area of concern "women in power and decision-making" (chapter IV.G), the Platform for Action affirms that women have the equal right to participate in governance and that the empowerment, autonomy and full citizenship of women are essential for their advancement in other spheres of life and for more transparent and accountable governance (para. 181). It further proposes numerous actions to be taken to achieve quickly a major breakthrough towards equality in power sharing and decision-making and gender balanced composition in all decision-making bodies at the national and international levels. Suggested measures include reform of electoral systems (para. 190 (d)), increase in women's participation and roles in political parties (para. 191), changes in recruitment and career development procedures in the civil service (paras. 192 and 195 (b)), and achievement of a "critical mass of women leaders" (para. 192 (a)).

61. The Platform for Action further emphasizes the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective for the achievement of these goals, stating that "women in politics and decision-making positions in Governments and legislative bodies contribute to redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address women's gender-specific concerns, values and experiences, and providing new perspectives on mainstream political issues (para. 182).

62. Owing to the particularly gross under-representation of women in decision-making in the areas of peace, security and conflict resolution, the Platform for Action points to the need to "strengthen the role of women and ensure equal representation of women at all decision-making levels in national and international institutions which may make or influence policy with regard to matters related to peace-keeping, preventive diplomacy and related activities and in all stages of peace mediation and negotiations" (para. 144 (c)) and to "integrate a gender perspective in the resolution of armed or other conflicts" (para. 142 (b)).

A. Participation in political decision-making as a basic human right

63. The principle of equality between men and women in public life is affirmed by the Charter of the United Nations (Preamble; Article 8), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (General Assembly resolution 217 A (III)) and a number of other international treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which 154 States are parties.

64. At the international level, women's right to equal participation in politics and Government has been advocated for the past 50 years by the Commission on the Status of Women. The Commission has called for equal participation of women and men in Government and the exercise by women of all rights of citizenship, irrespective of race, language or religion, including the right to vote, to be elected and to hold public office.[22]

65. Less prominent in the international discussion of women's role in decision-making has been their potential contribution to decision-making in areas such as peace, security and conflict resolution. Yet, women in particular have suffered as victims of wars and other conflicts and mass rape, and today constitute a majority of refugees. Their participation in preventive diplomacy or in resolving conflicts, however, continues to be extremely limited.

66. Moreover, despite long-standing recognition internationally of the fundamental right of women and men to participate in political life, and the recognition of this right in most national constitutions, in practice, the gap between the de jure and de facto equality of women in the area of decision-making remains wide. Whereas in almost all countries of the world, with the exception of two, women have the legal right to vote and to hold public office on an equal basis with men, in practice relatively few women have been elected to national legislatures, and even fewer occupy key decision-making positions, including in international organizations such as the United Nations.

1. Women in parliaments and in government decision-making

67. No major changes in data and trends related to the representation of women in parliaments and Governments have been identified since the Fourth World Conference on Women. Thus, the information on the topic contained in the Secretary-General's report on the participation of women in political life and

decision-making (E/CN.6/1995/12), submitted to the Commission at its thirty-ninth session, in 1995, is still relevant. There are, however, a few observations that can be made in this respect.

68. The downward trend in women's representation in parliaments continues. The results of recent Inter-Parliamentary Union studies indicate that the average number of women in parliaments, which had declined globally from 14.8 per cent in 1988 to 11.3 per cent in 1995, further decreased to 10.5 per cent in 1996.[23] The low number of women in parliaments indicates that despite decades of women's suffrage in most countries, women have not yet used their vote as a means of demanding an equal share of power and participation in political decision-making.

69. Regional and subregional trends also prevailed; for example, in Scandinavia in 1996 the record of women in parliament continued to be impressive, ranging from 33 per cent to 40.4 per cent. In a number of countries that gained full adult suffrage more recently, when the right to vote and participate in political life had become more widely accepted (Mozambique, the Seychelles and South Africa), women quickly achieved higher-than-average representation in parliaments, above 20 per cent.

70. In Eastern Europe, with recent moves toward democratization and the introduction of free elections and of multi-party systems, a sharp decline in the number of female parliamentarians over the previous record continued, although the figures have improved with each consecutive election. In some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, during the transition from one-party rule to multi-party systems, there was a decline in women in parliaments.[23]

71. Analysis by the Division for the Advancement of Women shows slow progress in women's representation in government decision-making positions at all levels globally (including minister, deputy minister, permanent secretary and head of department or the equivalent). Women made up only 6.8 per cent of cabinet ministers worldwide in 1996 and remained heavily concentrated in such areas as social affairs, education, health and women and the family. A significant improvement has been noted in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the rate of progress has accelerated to approach the levels of women's representation in the "Europe and others" region (i.e., Europe, Canada and the United States of America), which had traditionally led in almost all areas. In 1996, women in governmental decision-making at all levels in Latin America and the Caribbean reached 14 per cent, compared with 15 per cent in the "Europe and others" region. The positive change in the region should be further studied, as its experiences can be useful in other parts of the world.

72. Generally, however, it should be noted that there is an apparent glass ceiling for women in government administration and that women are concentrated in the more "social" ministries.

2. Women in multilateral diplomacy and international organizations

73. It appears that administrative restrictions and discriminatory practices that affect women more severely than men are even more prevalent in the diplomatic services than in other areas, at least in some countries.

74. Women are noticeably absent from decision-making in international organizations. In the United Nations, the percentage of women Professional staff reached 35 per cent in 1996.[24] The percentage of women at the senior managerial level (D-1 level and above) amounted to only 17.9 per cent in 1996. Their distribution, however, was uneven. For example, in 1996, the Department of Political Affairs had 22.2 per cent women at senior managerial levels, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 6.7 per cent, and the Department of Public Information, 28 per cent. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs had no women at the upper levels (D-1 and above). At the level of Assistant Secretary-General, the proportion of women declined from 14.3 per cent (four women) in 1986 to 6.7 per cent (one woman) in 1996, while at the level of Under-Secretary-General, the proportion of women increased from 0 per cent to 4.8 per cent (one woman).[25] Throughout the history of United Nations peacekeeping and electoral support there have been only two women in charge of United Nations missions. In 51 years, only two women have presided over the General Assembly.

75. Generally, it can be noted that little progress has been achieved in the past 50 years; that only a small number of women took an active part in political life; and that there is a high degree of social and political tolerance for such a situation.

B. Factors contributing to women's participation in the political process

76. The factors that contribute to greater numbers of women in public decision-making - whether through the national political process, that is the electoral process or political appointment, or through professional careers in the civil service - need to be further explored. Preliminary research by the Division for the Advancement of Women has indicated, however, that where the female electorate has emerged as a force to be reckoned with, the competition for votes has led many political parties to promote more women within their ranks and nominate them as candidates in order to secure women's votes and to include in their platforms issues which are particularly important to women. This has been done by, for example, the Social Democratic Parties of Austria, Germany, Poland and the Scandinavian countries. This strategy on the part of some parties has forced other parties to join in the competition for votes by placing women in more visible positions and by becoming more gender-sensitive.

77. Where women have demonstrated a clear preference for those parties and candidates that are gender-sensitive and supportive of women's interests, especially with regard to reproductive rights, social services, participation in decision-making, elimination of violence against women and environmental protection, close parliamentary or presidential contests have been influenced or the outcome determined by the female voters and their preferences. This has

occurred in such diverse countries and areas as Argentina, Austria, Germany, Poland, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Uganda, the United States of America and Scandinavia.

78. Women's participation in political decision-making is believed to be linked to such factors as women's education and female literacy; women's participation in the labour force; availability of childcare; women's health status; female entrepreneurship; strong women's organizations and movements; gender-sensitive legislation, and changes in the judicial system towards eradicating violence against women. It also tends to be higher in countries with a high level of legal literacy, where women's issues and concerns constitute part of public debate and where women's non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups and networks have been able to play a visible role.[26]

79. Special measures and policies aimed directly at accelerating de facto equality between men and women in decision-making have also promoted more women in political decision-making. They have been applied in some countries in order to ensure a certain percentage of women in political parties, parliaments and/or public boards. For example, in certain countries some leading political parties have established quotas for women, including in their governing bodies (Austria, Botswana, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Venezuela). Other countries, for example, Argentina and the United Republic of Tanzania, have implemented quotas reserving a minimum number of seats in parliaments for women. A similar practice is being legislated in India at all levels of government. In Bangladesh and India, special measures have been taken to introduce a female quota in local bodies. In the Nordic countries, quotas of 40 to 60 per cent for each sex are applied to all public boards and committees. The effectiveness of such measures differs from country to country and remains a subject of debate.

80. On the other hand, the number of women in political decision-making continues to be affected negatively by numerous obstacles, already identified in previous reports,[27] such as an unequal division of household duties; women's lack of economic independence or financial means; custom and tradition that define the public sphere as the male domain while relegating women to the private domestic sphere; prevailing negative attitudes towards women's political participation; a lack of confidence in and support for female candidates by the electorate, including women, and political parties; media stereotyping and more demanding criteria for women politicians than for men.

81. In pursuing civil service careers at both the national and international levels women are particularly affected by the prevalence of "closed" recruitment and promotion systems, often based on patronage or "old boys' networks", without clear requirements for entry or promotion and without transparency in the process; bias in job evaluation and classification; insufficient appeal mechanisms and a general absence of women from appeal bodies and selection, appointment and promotion panels; unequal opportunities for career and training development; the marginalization of women in some areas of the civil service traditionally considered as related to women and their systematic exclusion from others (e.g., foreign affairs, defence, the interior, central banks, economic affairs), or their relegation to positions to implement affirmative action policies rather than mainstream substantive issues.

82. Although most of these obstacles have been known for a long time, no adequate measures have been developed to address them efficiently.

C. Political decision-making and conflict resolution

83. The idea that women would make a difference in political decision-making and that societies and decision makers can take advantage of this difference needs to be further investigated. Not enough evidence seems as yet to be available to generalize about the particular contributions of women to political decision-making. The theory of a "critical mass" argues that women can make a difference in the political process if they achieve a "critical mass" of at least 30-35 per cent and act as a group.[28] The absence of a critical mass, of women from decision-making, it has been argued, deprives society of the "gender difference" in terms of the distinct issues, experiences, perspectives and approaches that women may bring to the process.

84. The recognition of the importance of gender differences and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into political decision-making and conflict resolution processes was emphasized by the Expert Group Meeting on Political Decision-making and Conflict Resolution: The Impact of Gender Difference, organized jointly by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women and the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, in cooperation with the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, held in the Dominican Republic from 7 to 11 October 1996.[29]

85. The Meeting, which was attended by both mainstream experts in conflict resolution and feminist scholars and activists, provided an example of gender mainstreaming in practice. The conclusions reached despite differences of opinion and approach suggested that:

(a) Significant differences in women's and men's behaviour, attitudes, and styles result from different social constructions of female and male identities and roles and from different social positions;

(b) Bringing a gender perspective to bear on decision-making, including conflict resolution, means recognizing that women and men are differently involved in political processes. Much of politics and social research has been conducted in a way that is blind to gender difference, and this has meant that men and their male norms have been taken to represent the norm for all human beings. This has resulted in making women invisible as well as excluding them;

(c) Recognition of a gender perspective means fostering a better understanding of gender roles in specific contexts. As a broad range of research and experience indicates, women appear to have different definitions, for example, of peace and security, and different attitudes towards conflict resolution from those of men. Thus, a gender perspective might help to develop a fuller understanding of decision-making and conflict-resolution processes which could change the present conceptualization of political discourse and culture, redrafting political agendas and priorities and broadening the view of conflict resolution and politics generally.

86. The Expert Group Meeting concluded that applying a gender perspective might bring about, inter alia, the following changes: the present conception of politics might be altered; political discourse and the political culture might change; there might well be changes in the political agenda and in the way issues already on the political agenda are treated; the reaction to women politicians is likely to change, leading to less discrimination; there might be an increase in the participation of women in political decision-making, leading to the creation of women's new role models.

87. The Meeting stated that a gender perspective should be applied in all areas of public decision-making, including peace processes, responses to armed conflict, and training and capacity-building. The consistent application of a gender perspective would facilitate more rapid implementation of United Nations norms and principles, as well as encourage new, more participatory and inclusive ways of governance.

88. The Meeting reaffirmed the recommendation contained in paragraph 144 (c) of the Platform for Action to strengthen the role of women and ensure equal representation of women at all decision-making levels in national and international institutions which may make or influence policy with regard to matters related to peacekeeping, preventive diplomacy and related activities and in all stages of peace mediation and negotiations, taking note of the specific recommendations of the Secretary-General in his strategic plan of action for the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (1995-2000) (A/49/587, sect. IV).

89. Experts stressed that United Nations bodies should take into consideration the integrated follow-up to recommendations of the world conferences and summits of the 1990s, the link with conflict resolution, especially in terms of addressing violence, and promoting the mainstreaming of a gender perspective. The target of 50 per cent women in decision-making in the United Nations by the year 2000 should be pursued with concrete special measures.

90. The Meeting also built on the 1994 Expert Group Meeting on Gender and the Agenda for Peace, organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women, which concluded that those United Nations peace and security missions that had a greater gender balance in their mission staff appeared to have been particularly effective. Such missions were those to Namibia, in which 60 per cent of the Professional civilian staff were women, and South Africa, in which 53 per cent of the staff serving in civilian jobs during the first 16 months were women. It also pointed to some effects which have been observed when women form a critical mass in United Nations peacekeeping missions - so far largely in civilian jobs.[10]

D. Strategies to accelerate implementation

91. There remains in the post-Beijing period, an urgent need to promote gender-balance in decision-making in parliaments, government administration, diplomacy and international organizations and, perhaps more important, an awareness of gender issues and their consistent application to legislation and policy-making. Otherwise, gender equality will remain an elusive goal and humanity will be limited to male perspectives in its efforts for development. But the question

arises how best to ensure gender-balance in decision-making at all levels within the shortest possible time-frame.

92. The Platform for Action proposed a number of ways to increase women's role in power and decision-making. The Commission may wish to examine some of them:

(a) With regard to political parties, their structures and procedures, attention should be given to ways and means which are required to remove discriminatory practices; gender issues should be incorporated in political agendas and ensure women's access to leadership positions on an equal basis with men should be assured, as should their participation in appointive and electoral nominating processes;

(b) In terms of electoral systems, attention should be given to the impact of various types of electoral systems on women's representation. Suggestions for subsequent changes and reforms of electoral systems towards gender-balanced representation should be made;

(c) Efforts need to be made by all actors in Governments, the private sector, political parties and non-governmental organizations to review the criteria used in recruitment and appointment to advisory and decision-making bodies and promotion to senior positions and ensure that they do not discriminate against women. Recruitment and career development programmes should be restructured accordingly to ensure a gender-balanced composition of decision-making bodies and the transparency of criteria for recruitment and promotion;

(d) Comprehensive action to ensure a critical mass of women leaders in all areas and at all levels of decision-making should be undertaken by Governments, international organizations and civil society. The mechanisms to monitor women's access to decision-making positions should be created or strengthened;

(e) The existence of comprehensive databases disaggregated by sex is essential to demonstrating the extent to which women do or do not participate in government and in other political arenas. Therefore, further improvement of existing databases is essential for strengthening policies and programmes aimed at gender equality in decision-making;

(f) Commitment to the measures aimed at increased participation of women in decision-making between now and the year 2000 by countries where women's participation in public life is lagging could lead to a major shift in women's role. It would bring the voice of women more directly into the political process and in so doing, fulfil an important objective of the Platform for Action, empowering women to participate equally in power and decision-making.

93. The Commission may wish to reinforce these proposals and suggest concrete and tangible measures which would result in the gender-balanced distribution of decision-making positions between now and the year 2000.

IV. WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

94. The agreements reached in the past decade at the series of global conferences and summits organized by the United Nations have sought to frame the development challenges in an era of rapid social, economic and political change. Notably, results of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, have reflected an evolving understanding within the international community of the interlinkage between women, environment, population and sustainable development.

95. Agenda 21,[11] adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development recognized that women had a critical role to play in achieving sustainable development and put the issue of women and the environment on the world agenda. Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 (Global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development) called for "analysis of the structural linkages between gender relations, environment and development" (para. 24.8 (d)). However, by referring to women as a major group along with children, youth and indigenous people, chapter 24 implies that mainstream development is essentially a male domain.

96. This concept of women as a special group was superseded in Cairo and Beijing. In Cairo it was emphasized that there could be no sustainable development without the full participation of women in mainstream activities. The focus was on the importance of women's economic and political empowerment and on establishing a broadened approach to reproductive health and rights.

97. The Beijing Platform for Action reaffirmed the advances made in Cairo and also went beyond the traditional integration of women into the existing development agenda by emphasizing the need for a gender perspective at the outset in order to shape the development agenda. This commitment to a gender perspective has been since reiterated by, for example, the General Assembly in its resolutions 50/203 and 51/69.

98. The Platform for Action provided an extensive discussion of women and the environment in the context of sustainable development, examining women's role and contribution to conservation and management of natural resources and to safeguarding the environment, particularly at the local level. The Platform called for more participation of women at all levels of decision-making and advocacy in natural resources and environmental management, conservation, protection and rehabilitation. It emphasized that sustainable development would be "an elusive goal unless women's contribution to environmental management is recognized and supported". It called on Governments and other actors to "promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes, including, as appropriate, an analysis of the effects on women and men, respectively, before decisions are taken" (paras. 250-252).

99. Notably, as a result of recent global conferences, Governments have committed themselves to creating a new development paradigm that integrates environmental sustainability with gender equality and justice within and between generations (para. 248). However, an analysis of the 25 national plans for

action received by the Division for the Advancement of Women suggests that there are few with national strategies for carrying out the strategic objectives and actions on women and environment agreed at Beijing.

100. These findings were confirmed by the Expert Group Meeting on Women, Population and Sustainable Development: The Road from Rio, Cairo and Beijing, organized jointly by the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Division for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW),[32] which took place in the Dominican Republic from 18 to 22 November 1996. Experts noted that the link between women and environment as spelled out in the Platform for Action had yet to be translated into policies and programmes in most countries.

A. Women as actors in relation to environmental issues

101. One set of advocates in the developmental debate tended to focus on women as either victims or saviours of the environment. They emphasized the impact of environmental degradation on poor women, which is seen to increase women's burden of work, making it more difficult for them to gather fuel, find clean water and otherwise exploit natural resources for their subsistence and that of their families.

102. The implicit assumption is also that, because many of the world's women are consumers of primary resources, they are responsible for the depletion of these resources. At best, this approach places great responsibility on rural women in particular. Not only must they cope with managing scarce resources under difficult conditions of poverty, they must find a way of doing so while conserving these resources. At worst, this approach blames the poor, and poor women in particular, for environmental degradation. Notably, it is often the poorest households that are exposed to environmental risk as they manage resources. The poorer households tend to be rural dwellers, migrants from rural areas or female headed households.

103. Such an approach tends to focus on women, primarily in their reproductive roles, and the impact of an expanding population on the environment. This approach tends to hold women responsible for population growth which, in turn, is seen to be responsible for resource depletion and non-sustainability. By targeting women through family planning programmes, the proponents of this point of view see women as potential conservers of the environment should they reduce their fertility. Moreover, women are seen as nurturers with a natural affinity for nature and, therefore, are perceived to be a potentially powerful force for environmental protection. However, this assumption that there should be an emphasis on a special relation between women and nature has been refuted by another point of view.[33]

104. A growing recognition of the role of gender in relation to environmental issues has resulted in a more refined analysis of women's as well as men's roles. In that respect, the relationship between women and the environment should be seen within the overall system of gender relations, keeping in mind that gender refers to the socially constructed roles played by women and men

that are ascribed to them on the basis of their sex, and that gender roles are usually contingent on the social and economic context, and can both vary according to the specific context and change over time.[34]

105. The Platform for Action called for a gender analysis of how men and women interact with the environment and natural resources. It called for consideration of what the division of labour between women and men is, and what their roles and responsibilities are in this respect. Attention was drawn to the link between women's subordination in general and the obstacles they face in order to be effective managers of natural resources.

106. The Platform for Action called for Governments to "develop a strategy for change to eliminate all obstacles to women's full and equal participation in sustainable development and equal access to and control over resources" (para. 256 (g)). It stressed the importance of examining women's access to and control over resources, rights and ownership, capacity-building through education and training, reform of legal systems to recognize women's rights as human rights, and their participation in decision-making on environment and sustainable development.

107. The emphasis in the Platform for Action was on women's potential as environmental managers and actors in various domains of life: productive, reproductive, social, cultural and political. In this regard, the Expert Group Meeting emphasized that the responsibility for environmental damage that is assigned to women cannot be separated from the system of which they are a part. The main cause of forest depletion, for instance, can hardly be attributed only to women, though in many places they are responsible for gathering wood. The bulk of wood cutting is done by multinational or large enterprises responding to external market demands, or by local entrepreneurs responding to local market demands. Moreover, in some cultures men have taken the role of fetching wood after nearby forests have been cut down and distances and danger have increased.

108. The Platform also stated that the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment was the unsustainable pattern of overall consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries (para. 246). In other words, the patterns of consumption and production are important factors in understanding both the extent of ecological degradation as well as possibilities of sustaining development. Gender analysis might also provide better understanding of the patterns of consumption and production.

B. Global and local environmental issues: a gender perspective

109. Beijing reaffirmed the agreements achieved in Rio and Cairo by emphasizing that addressing the problem of deterioration of environment should include a systematic reflection of interlinkages between global and local issues of sustainable development with a gender perspective.

110. What is required fundamentally is a different perspective that integrates the micro and macro, bridges the public and private domains (especially the productive and reproductive spheres) and empowers different sectors of society,

including both women and men to be effective in environmental decision-making. A gender perspective is essential to establishing the cross-sectoral links as women play a mediating role in all spheres of society.

111. Global issues of sustainable development, including globalization of the economy, frequently manifest themselves at the local level. However, while some issues can be resolved at the local level, with social and economic costs and benefits accruing within the community or locality (for example, certain water and air pollution), some global issues can only be resolved at the macro level.

112. The sources or causes of many environmental problems experienced in both rural and urban areas originate from outside the boundaries of the household or community. Solutions therefore depend on external support. As a result of globalization, even in communities where women are having a positive impact on natural resource management and sustainability at the local level, this might be negated by global economic forces.

113. Results from case studies undertaken in Latin American peri-urban and rural communities as presented to the Expert Group Meeting[35] confirmed that while women are often the first line of defence in protecting the health and well-being of their families and communities, their ability to do so is often diminished by decisions made and environmental degradation that takes place outside their community or locality. In many situations, women may bear the brunt of the costs at the local level and are forced to work longer hours with fewer resources for lower rewards.

114. Women are often left to try to mitigate the cost of environmental degradation. Unfortunately, the magnitude of environmental problems exceeds their ability to mitigate the health and economic effects of environmental degradation, as does the lack of resources available to them.

115. Such situations also exist in much of the Africa region. There, despite the global environmental problems and impact of globalized economic systems, including structural adjustment programmes, the relationship of women to the environment as important producers, managers and consumers remains a visible constant, but is tempered by limits to access and control over resources, including land.

116. The conclusions reached at the Meeting suggested that sustainable development requires local level interventions in agriculture, fisheries, forest programmes and so forth, which are integrated and environmentally sensitive and take into account the needs and interests of both men and women. It also requires examination of macro level policies and programmes through a gender lens and introduction of the appropriate institutional mechanisms and regulations. This, in turn, implies a supportive political milieu which weighs the relative social, economic and environmental costs and benefits of development from a gender perspective. It also calls for a socio-political environment in which both men and women can have a voice to state their priorities and highlight the mechanisms for ending poverty, ecological degradation and stabilizing population.

C. Women as environmental decision makers

117. Women as well as men have a vested interest in sustainable development. Women's empowerment and increased role in decision-making are a necessary prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. The Platform for Action called for Governments at all levels to ensure opportunities for women, including indigenous women, to participate in environmental decision-making (para. 253). The participation of women in decision-making, it has been argued, alters the style of decision-making, particularly if there is a critical mass of women in a position to influence decisions.

118. It has been well-documented, in all regions of the world that at the local level, because of the way in which women's productive and reproductive roles link them to resources central to sustainable development, that their presence in decision-making does result in different decisions related to sustainable development.

119. At the local level, women who are empowered and in decision-making roles have generally had an important positive influence on the involvement of other women in decision-making processes. Women in decision-making, and the involvement of women in decision-making processes, is also related to women's sense of ownership of the processes and of the systems and resources that decisions will have an impact on. In that respect, the participation of women and their empowerment can bring positive changes in gender relations which will benefit society.

120. Women's empowerment is crucial for them to have the capacity to deal more effectively with the effects of environmental degradation. Economic and political empowerment of women, combined with the local knowledge of women about the environment, is a basic building-block for development policies which should be sustainable and empowering.

121. However, the focus on women's empowerment and participation in decision-making should not divert attention from the fact that the task of averting and managing environmental crises and of population stabilization should be a responsibility shared with men. Economic and political empowerment of women does not mean that they alone should take on the additional challenge of environmental protection.

D. Strategies to accelerate implementation

122. The Beijing Platform for Action highlighted three strategic objectives in the critical area of concern on women and the environment: involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels; integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development; strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.

123. To achieve these objectives, a wide range of actions have been outlined by the Expert Group Meeting and by others. As a result of Beijing, a new emphasis

has been placed on enabling women to be active decision makers, planners and designers of projects for sustainable development, particularly at the local level; improving access of women to skills through expansion of extension services and training in science, technology and economics and developing gender-sensitive databases and integrating traditional knowledge of women into resource management programmes.

124. The Platform for Action contributed to a better understanding of sustainability from a gender perceptive. It has also made a critical contribution to awareness-creation, on a worldwide basis, concerning the particular burdens placed on women in the environmental domain and of the important role which women can play. Women are correctly seen as valuable actors and partners in better environmental management.

125. In order to accelerate the implementation of the strategic objectives in the critical area of concern relating to women and the environment, the Commission might wish to consider the conclusions and recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting on Women, Population and Sustainable Development and suggest tangible measures for different actors to undertake on a priority basis.

126. The Expert Group Meeting concluded, inter alia, that:

(a) Women's environmental roles are to be considered in the context of their other roles or responsibilities in both the reproductive and productive spheres. In order to elaborate gender-sensitive policies, women should not be seen as one-dimensional - as the primary victims or primary conservers of the environment or as a homogenous group. Such factors as age, race and socio-economic status are equally significant and needed in policy analysis and programmes;

(b) The consideration of environmental issues should not be focused exclusively on women. Men and their roles are essential to a balanced analysis. Qualitative and quantitative indicators need to be developed and used in the measurements of the impacts of gender mainstreaming;

(c) Understanding the gender differences provides scope for identifying whether joint or targeted programmes and projects are necessary. Due to the existing inequalities and lower socio-economic status of women, the projects that target women should be continued, but they should go along with mainstream projects which take women's needs and interests into account;

(d) In line with recommendations and agreements made at the international level regarding the levels of financial and technical support necessary to achieve population stabilization and sustainable development in the context of individual human rights and the empowerment of women, Governments and international agencies should increase funding and reassign budget allocations for gender-sensitive population and sustainable development programmes;

(e) Development and cooperation agencies should ensure that all projects incorporate gender mainstreaming as an essential component. The allocations of resources for gender mainstreaming should be made from within budgets for population and sustainable development activities. Separate and earmarked funds

for women's programmes, where they exist, should not bear the burden of resource allocation for gender mainstreaming;

(f) The environmental problems require effective action at both the international and national levels, taking a gender perspective into account. A gender-sensitive connection should be made between macroeconomic and political processes: overconsumption of natural resources by the few in the North and poverty of the many in the South. The implications of the ongoing process of globalization should be considered through a gender lens;

(g) In policies and programmes related to sustainable development, particular attention should be given to understanding gender differences in local or global environmental impacts. Of equal importance is that the costs and benefits, including non-monetary measurements, of addressing environmental problems be disaggregated by gender and assessed at local and supra-local levels;

(h) Women should be able to exercise their rights and be involved in decision-making process at the local, national, regional and international levels. Their perspectives should be included in designing and implementing policies and programmes in the area of sustainable development;

(i) Given that the empowerment of women is an issue of human rights and is essential to achieving sustainable and equitable development, and given the critical role played by women's organizations in the move towards more sustainable development, the United Nations and other multilateral and bilateral donors should enhance their procedures for support to women's organizations, in all their diversity. In line with agreements reached in Rio, Cairo and Beijing, financial and in-kind assistance to women's organizations should be increased in all areas of empowerment, including support to local women to relieve their burden of multiple roles;

(j) The implementation of the Beijing recommendations should be undertaken along with the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, as well as of other agreements of United Nations conferences and summits, in an integrated way. The issue of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the area of sustainable development should be a focus of the review of the implementation of Agenda 21 to be carried out by the General Assembly at its special session in 1997;

(k) Before planning is undertaken and policy formulated, Governments should establish consultative mechanisms within all sectors of government in order to mainstream a gender perspective, promote equality and equity, and implement, in an integrated way, the recommendations of United Nations conferences;

(l) Training and education on issues of population and sustainable development should be provided to programmes and units within international institutions, national machineries and non-governmental organizations that work on gender;

(m) Advocacy campaigns based on valid and reliable research findings should be developed in order to help overcome resistance towards innovative gender mainstreaming in population and sustainable development policies and programmes.

Notes

[1] Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20 and Add.1), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

[2] Report of the Secretary-General on the promotion of literacy, education and training, including technological skills (E/CN.6/1995/11), annex.

[3] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Compendium of Statistics on Illiteracy, 1995 edition, Statistical Reports and Studies, No. 35.

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[5] World Bank, Vocational and Technical Education and Training, a World Bank Policy Paper (Washington, D.C., 1991).

[6] Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning of Women (EGM/VOCA/1996/1).

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[8] See, in particular, the World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, adopted by the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990).

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[10] Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Women and Economic Decision-making in International Financial Institutions and Transnational Corporations (EDM/IFI-TNC/1996/1).

[11] International Labour Organization, 261st session of the Governing Body, "Changing role of women in the economy: employment and social issues" (GB.261/ESP/2/2), Geneva, 1994.

[12] The Wall Street Journal, 18 October 1996.

[13] Sunanta Siengthai, "Women and economic decision-making in international financial institutions and transnational corporations in Thailand", paper presented at the Expert Group Meeting on Women and Economic Decision-making in

International Financial Institutions and Transnational Corporations (EDM/IFI-TNC/1996/WP.3).

[11] Dawn Mokhobo, "Shattering the glass ceiling: the South African reality", paper presented at the Expert Group Meeting on Women and Economic Decision-making in International Financial Institutions and Transnational Corporations (EDM/IFI-TNC/1996/WP.4).

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[14] Apollonia Kerenge, "Women and decision-making in international financial institutions: the African perspective", paper presented at the Expert Group Meeting on Women and Economic Decision-making in International Financial Institutions and Transnational Corporations (EDM/IFI-TNC/1996/WP.2).

[15] "Women and economic decision-making: experience of the United Nations", paper prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women for the Expert Group Meeting on Women and Economic Decision-making in International Financial Institutions and Transnational Corporations (EDM/IFI-TNC/1996/BP.1).

[16] Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Men and Women of the Corporation (New York, Basic Books, 1977); and Gary Powell, Women and Men in Management (Beverly Hills, California, Sage, 1988).

[17] Nancy Adler, Competitive Frontiers: Women Managers in a Global Economy (Blackwell, 1994).

[18] Lin Lean Lim, More and Better Jobs for Women: An Action Guide (Geneva, International Labour Office, 1996).

[19] See the terms of reference set out in the report of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/281/Rev.1).

[20] Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in Parliaments, 1945-1995: A World Statistical Survey, Series "Reports and Documents", No. 23 (Geneva, 1995) and Press Releases of 27 August 1995 and 20 October 1996.

[21] Report of the Secretary-General entitled "Human resources management: composition of the Secretariat" (A/51/421 and Corr.1), table E.

[22] Report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/51/304 and Corr.1), table 3.

[23] See, inter alia, indicators used to construct the Human Development Index and the Gender-related Development Index, in United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report, 1996 (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996); and Women in Politics and Decision-Making in the Late

Twentieth Century: A United Nations Study (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.91.IV.3).

[11] Report of the Secretary-General on equality in political participation and decision-making (E/CN.6/1990/2 and Corr.1).

[12] The concept of critical mass was proposed by Drude Dahlerup, a Danish scholar. See her article, "From a small to a large minority: women in Scandinavian politics", Scandinavian Political Studies, vol. 11, No. 4 (1988).

[13] "Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Political Decision-making and Conflict Resolution: The Impact of Gender Difference" (EGM/PDCR/1996/1).

[14] See Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Gender and the Agenda for Peace (GAP.1994/1); Report of the Secretary-General on the participation of women in political decision-making (E/CN.6/1995/12); and Division for the Advancement of Women, "The role of women in United Nations peacekeeping", Women 2000, No. 1 (December 1995).

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